THE EMERGING POLITICAL CONSCIOUSNESS OF GERTRUDE WEIL: EDUCATION AND WOMEN'S CLUBS, 1879-1914

by

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this thesis is to document and illuminate the education and politicization of Gertrude Weil (1879-1971), a native North Carolinian who was active in social reform and women's rights movements. Her relationships with other women in school, women's clubs and at home were essential to the development of her political consciousness and her rise as an activist. The importance of these relationships is emphasized throughout the thesis.

Chapter One describes her background and formative years as a young girl growing up in the thriving Southern town of Goldsboro. This chapter emphasizes her unique background as a first generation German Jew educated in a new school system based on the German method of education. Unlike many young Southern schoolgirls, Gertrude was expected to continue her education: attending Horace Mann School at Columbia Teachers College in New York and later Smith College in Northampton, Massachusetts. The Horace Mann years are also included in Chapter One.

Chapter Two focuses on Gertrude's years at Smith College, her views of college life and the experiences and courses which most influenced her. Her exposure to the settlement house movement, George Washington Cable's Home-Culture Club and women's suffrage helped form her attitudes toward social reform and women's place in politics.

The third chapter deals with Weil's first years after graduating from Smith and her attempt to find a useful

direction for her life. Some background on women's clubs in North Carolina is provided here since Weil and the women of her family were intimately involved in the formation and operation of several organizations. The women's clubs provide a key link between the women concerned with social welfare issues and the political action of women. Through working in these organizations, Weil developed an appreciation for the need of women to have a voice in government and turned her energies toward female suffrage.

INTRODUCTION

In the late nineteenth century the status of middle-class women in the United States was at a crucial point of evolution; the traditional role of women as childbearers and homemakers was on the verge of broadening to include work outside the home, politics and social reform. The rapid growth of industry and urban areas, with accomanying social discontent and economic adversity, created an atmosphere in which women began to question their positions in society and their future as citizens. Such writers and theorists as Thorstein Veblin and Charlotte Perkins Gilman depicted women in their present state as chattel of men and prisoners of an unjust political and economic system. Others, such as Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony, challenged women to organize and gain for themselves the right to vote and by that the ability to influence the political and social state of the nation. By challenging tradition, women hoped to win for themselves the opportunities to develop according to individual abilities and the pressing needs of modern society and not according to outmoded social prescriptions which put strict limits on woman's proper place.[1]

In the same period, expansion in the higher education of women played a key role in developing a new generation of

women willing to challenge traditional sex roles. Throughout the nineteenth century "female seminaries," which taught both domestic arts and academic subjects, were established to educate women to be more enlightened citizens and to pass this intelligence on to their households and children. By the 1870s, with the growth of the "leisure class," women's colleges were created to give middle and upper-class daughters greater access to the life of the mind. Such colleges as Vassar, Smith, Bryn Mawr and Wellesley essentially adopted the same standards and curricula as the best men's colleges of the time. Having been treated as equals in the world of knowledge and having tasted the excitement of intellectual exploration, these first graduates frequently were unwilling to return to the restrictive domestic roles of their mothers. However, the experience of attending a women's college engendered aspirations for which the world outside the campus provided little room. In response, these first alumnae forged a place for themselves by pioneering in business and professional fields, and developing the entirely new field of social work.[2] The efforts of these graduates set the agenda of social reform for the first decades of the twentieth century.

Women's clubs and voluntary associations also proliferated in the atmosphere of the 1890s and provided outlets for these graduates and other middle-class women. Through the clubs women organized their talents for self-improvement and social reform. In addition to literary and cultural pursuits, women's clubs became involved in such issues as

Prohibition, sanitation, child labor, prostitution laws, and pure food and drug legislation. Many college educated women were especially attracted to the movement; club meetings allowed for an exchange of thoughts in an atmosphere receptive to their interests and abilities and enabled them to discuss social changes they desired. By the turn of the century, the membership of the General Federation of Women's Clubs, founded in 1889, had grown to more than one million women. Through the club movement, women gained a stronger voice in social and political issues.

Both the colleges and clubs heightened women's awareness of their status in society and caused many to search for alternatives by expanding their role or overturning old traditions. For those women who bridged the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, challenging tradition was a personal and often painful experience; there were no definite models by which to determine one's fate and no historical analysis by which to see one's place within the larger context of a movement. By exploring in retrospect the life of an individual who lived through these changes, particular elements of her education and experiences in the club movement emerge to shed light on the development of political interest among women of her generation. Gertrude Weil (1879-1971), a Southern woman of Jewish heritage, is an excellent example of how educational reforms and the women's club movement helped politicize these middle-class women.

Weil was an unusual mix of second-generation German

Jew, Northern-educated elite, world traveller and native North Carolinian, and was certainly not a typical Southern woman. However, she also felt a strong allegiance to her home state and town and, regardless of her experiences, advantages and disagreements, she always came home to North Carolina. In addition, she was educated in a school that was on the cutting edge of progressive education in the South and in innovative Northern schools. At Horace Mann School and Smith College she was introduced to female social reformers and encouraged to understand and question the political and economic system. Women's clubs gave her the opportunity to work and lobby for social reforms and enabled her to emerge as a state leader for women's suffrage.

Gertrude Weil never ran for elected offices implied by the term "political career." But she did shape platforms, set policies, and hold such titles as President, Executive Secretary, Secretary, Vice President and Chairman. Through her work, Weil influenced the social welfare policies of her state and inspired other women to take an active interest in politics and encouraged them to work through the political system for social change. She served as President of the North Carolina Equal Suffrage League for two terms helping women obtain the right to vote. Through organizations, such as the North Carolina Federation of Women's Clubs and the North Carolina League of Women Voters, Weil worked to have a respectable agency survey the working conditions of North Carolina women in order to convince legislators that the state needed labor laws more protective of women's health

and safety. League members fought the governor and powerful industrialists to obtain the information, continuing their efforts during the bloody strikes at Marion and Gastonia in 1928 when North Carolina's labor problems became national news.

Through her work in women's organizations, and her experiences as a Director of Public Relief in the 1930s, Weil became interested in the education and rights of black people. At the invitation of Governor O. Max Garner, she joined the North Carolina Commission on Interracial Cooperation in 1932. Frequently serving as an executive member, Weil remained on the Commission and its descendent, the North Carolina Council on Human Relations, until 1956. In her eighties, she openly supported the civil rights movement, sponsoring bi-racial committee meetings in her Goldsboro home in 1963. Weil also concentrated her efforts on assisting Jews throughout the late thirties and forties when many of her European relatives were fleeing from the terrors of the Holocaust. According to historian Marion Roydhouse, Weil "was the mainstay of almost every private effort connected with social welfare [in North Carolina] for a great many years, devoting large amounts of her time and her personal income."[3]

Although her social concerns ranged widely, all of Weil's work reflected a fundamental respect for human rights and freedoms of individuals. This attitude, which served as the foundation for her efforts, was formed in the 1890s and

early 1900s when Weil experienced the awakening of her political and feminist consciousness. She is a key transitional figure who successfully crossed from the Victorian Era to the twentieth century and emerged as one of the generation of "New Women:" educated, independent and willing to take a public political stand.

This thesis covers the years beginning with Gertrude's public school education and ending with her decision in 1914 to become actively involved in the suffrage movement. It is far beyond the scope of this work to provide a full account of this woman's life and activities. Rather, it is the ambition of the work to highlight factors in Gertrude Weil's education and early experiences in the women's club movement which were essential to her development as a leader of the state's women and an active social reformer; the emphasis here is on the process of her early development. Her religion was certainly a factor in her early formation, but the paucity of secondary work on Jewish women in the South, and in North Carolina particularly, prevents a sound treatment of this aspect of her life until more work is available. Her relationships with women in and outside of her family contributed to Gertrude's emergence as an advocate of women's rights and are therefore presented as essential features of her development.

CHAPTER I

Background and Early Education

Gertrude Weil, born in Goldsboro, North Carolina in 1879, possessed a lineage quite unlike most children of the South. Her paternal grandparents, Jacob (1809-1886) and Jette (1809-1889) Weil were originally from Germany and Bavaria, but emigrated to Baltimore following the lead of their two married daughters and three young sons. In Oberdorf, Germany, Jacob Weil, a Jewish merchant in the antique business, had earned a good living; however, after the 1848 German Rebellion the situation for most German and Bavarian Jews deteriorated. The Weils were no exception. The young sons, Herman, Henry and Sol, were treated harshly by Christian children from a neighboring village. More than a century after the Weil's emigration from Germany, Gertrude recalled anti-semitism as a major reason for the family's settlement in the United States.[4]

Herman Weil left Germany in 1858 at the age of sixteen and joined his married sisters, Bertha and Jeanette, in Baltimore. That same year he travelled to Goldsboro and clerked in the store of another German Jew, Henry Oettinger. At the start of the Civil War, Herman joined Captain J.B. Whitaker's Company of Goldsboro becoming one of ten thousand

Jews in the Confederate forces.[5] Henry Weil, Herman's younger brother, immigrated to Baltimore in 1860 and later joined his brother in the Rebel cause. At the end of the war, the two brothers were discharged from the Confederate army in Goldsboro and, after some years of peddling, began their own dried goods business in the town. The youngest brother, Sol, joined Herman and Henry in the late 1860s while Jeanette, Bertha, Jacob and Jette remained in Baltimore.

Gertrude's mother was also a native North Carolinian with an unusual heritage. Mina Rosenthal was born in Raleigh in 1859 of German Jewish immigrants, Emil and Eva Rosenthal. Several years before Mina's birth, her parents emigrated from Germany to Raleigh. Although the Rosenthal's could not accurately be considered southerners or Confederates, their location put them in the midst of the Civil War. Its tragedies formed some of Mina's earliest memories; fleeing from advancing Union troops, she observed her parents' pain as they broke the Jewish rules of kashruth by eating country ham to keep themselves and their children alive.[6] Jewish traditions continued to form a strong part of Mina's upbringing in Wilson, North Carolina where her family established a dried goods business after the war.

Wilson was only twenty miles west of Goldsboro and Henry Weil became a regular visitor at the Rosenthals, one of the few other Jewish families in the region. Although twelve years separated Henry's and Mina's ages, Henry took a strong liking to the Rosenthals' oldest daughter. Mina was

only a small child when Henry told the Rosenthals of his interest in marrying her. When she reached the age of fourteen, Henry formally proposed. The Rosenthals and their relatives considered Mina too young for marriage. In letters congratulating Henry on their engagement, Mina is referred to as a "really good, dear child" and a "model of a girl."[7] Although granting his "cousinly consent" Mina's cousin David Oettinger also told Henry that in his opinion she was "rather young...to have to think about getting married."

At the time Mina attended Wilson Collegiate Seminary for Young Ladies and Emil and Eva wanted her to finish her education before marrying. Some evidence suggests that Mina greatly enjoyed her studies and was not eager to marry thereby terminating her formal education. In a love letter Henry complained: "But for your wish for too much knowledge, I might have spent the morning in a very pleasant manner. It seems, though, that your love for Calculus, Chemistry, Trigonometry, and all those other kinds of tries is paramount over everything else. I am inclined to be somewhat jealous of your books."[8] At the seminary, run by a former University of North Carolina faculty member, Mina received a "Certificate of Praiseworthy Diligence and Success" in Greek and Roman history, algebra, geography, mathematics and arithmetic.[9] She also knew German and Hebrew. This same love and appreciation of education continued through Mina's life as she bore children and taught her male and female children the importance of mental discipline.

The Rosenthals did not allow their daughter to marry immediately. Not until 1875, after Mina's sixteenth birthday, did she and twenty-eight year old Henry wed. According to the Weil family biographer, Mina had ambitions to study medicine when she married and Henry had consented to her wishes. However, after their marriage, the couple immediately began having children and Mina's time was so taken up with her household duties that she gave up on her dream. At age seventeen, Mina bore a son, Leslie. She had a second child, Gertrude, in 1879 and a year later her third child, Herman was born. Twelve years after Herman's birth, Mina had another daughter and her last child, Janet.

Gertrude grew up during the first decades following Reconstruction, and although her family seemed little concerned with political affairs of the time, the town itself had a especially large store of Civil War legends that continued to engender a dislike for Union sympathizers after the fighting ceased. Toward the close of the Civil War, the town had been a major rendezvous point for four Union armies including Sherman's large force of regular soldiers and marauding bummers.[10] A branch of the Freedman's Bureau had been established and the undignified character and authority of the agents became legendary. Federal troops did not leave Goldsboro until less than two years before Gertrude's birth. This massive and lengthy occupation by enemy forces marked Goldsboro's history and created an oral and written tradition which was passed on to Gertrude's

generation and further maintained by the local chapter of the Daughters of the Confederacy. While Gertrude did not personally experience the fears and losses suffered by those who survived the war, she did grow up with tales of death, theft and rape perpetrated by enemies of the Confederacy. Like many ex-Confederates in the state, Gertrude's father and uncles were Conservative Democrats opposed to local black and white factions of the Republican Party. Their political sentiments placed them among southern "Redeemers," vehemently critical of the rule of blacks, scalawags and carpetbaggers. By the time Gertrude was born in 1879, the Democrats had regained a secure political hold in Goldsboro with tacit support from the Weils.

Unlike most school children of her region and time, Gertrude enjoyed the privileges of an elite and prospering merchant class. Although not a strong political force immediately after Reconstruction, the Weil families had a large part in shaping the financial history of the area. As Gertrude grew up, the Weils' businesses expanded to include a farm, a brick factory and a rice flakes factory, and Gertrude's father and other male relatives gained reputations as fair and responsible businessmen. In addition to their financial status, the Weil and Rosenthal men served the town as aldermen and schoolboard representatives. Goldsboro also had the advantage of being the only North Carolina town where the north-south and east-west railroad lines intersected. The Weil Brothers store was part of the post-war business recovery which made Goldsboro a major

trading center and common stopping place for travellers between trains. After Reconstruction the town served as a cultural center of the state, having more frequent contact with people of other regions than most North Carolina towns. The convenient rail lines also made it easier for the Weil's to maintain strong family ties with relatives in Baltimore and New York as the Weil brothers married and increased their extended family.

The women of the family, especially Mina, were known for their charity and general attention to the needs of the community through the Ladies Hebrew Benevolent Society. Mina and her mother were particularly instrumental in establishing and maintaining Temple Oheb Shalom, the first Jewish temple in Goldsboro. These two women also strongly supported the drive for a good public school in Goldsboro since both appreciated their schooling as young girls. Considering the advantages of wealth and education, it is not surprising that the Weils were instrumental in improving public education in North Carolina and encouraged all their children to pursue academic studies.

In North Carolina in the 1880s there were very few public schools and most of those were four month schools which did not offer courses beyond the sixth or eighth grade levels. Considering the generally poor condition of public schools in the South at that time, Gertrude had a surprisingly good scholastic beginning. Although the history of the education movement in North Carolina is commonly

dated from the late 1890s, it began fifteen to twenty years earlier in Goldsboro, a town with a relatively large population of German and Jewish immigrants who were particularly concerned with providing quality public education for their children.[11] In 1881, at the request of several "prominent citizens," Edward Pearson Moses moved to Goldsboro to establish a modern public school modeled on the German system.[12] It was at this school that Gertrude and her brothers and sister gained a sound educational background which enabled them to go on to higher education. In a 1970 interview Gertrude recalled that the public school in Goldsboro adequately prepared her for preparatory school and, later, college.

As Gertrude remembered, the school was ahead of its time and exposed her to material and methods of learning not available to most young Southern girls. The community was openly proud of the institution and its place as the model school of the state. Not only was Gertrude aware of the reputation of her school while a student in Goldsboro, but she also knew the broad educational opportunities open to both male and female Goldsboro school graduates. In an article Gertrude and another student published in their school paper, the Round Table, the young journalists wrote that one hundred and twenty-five school alumni pursued higher education after graduation from the Goldsboro public school. The girls attributed this to Moses's organization of the schools. They proudly wrote,

Is it too much to assert that the influence of the

> Goldsboro Graded School has been felt and is being felt throughout our State, when from its officers and students it has supplied seven Superintendents of other city public schools, two professors of the State Normal and Industrial School, one of two State Conductors of Teachers Institutes, a professor of the State university besides assistant professors at the University and colleges; teachers for city graded schools, and numbers of public and private teachers in many counties in North Carolina.

Although most Goldsboro school women in higher education went on to female colleges and normal schools in North Carolina, a few attended colleges in Chicago, New York and Boston; several women attended Mount Holyoke in Massachusetts just a short distance from Northampton where Gertrude later attended Smith College.[13][14] Unlike most Southern schoolgirls of the nineteenth century, Gertrude was able to envision for herself a future as a college graduate.

In addition to instilling in its students a pride in education, the Goldsboro public school also worked to teach children a sense of civic duty and the value of collective effort. Possibly, Gertrude's first involvement with clubs and organizations started at the graded school. In 1893 she was listed as a member of the Sigma Phi Literary Club, an organization of twenty-one girls and fifteen boys with a female student serving as secretary.[15] Students also cooperated with the social welfare work of the Ladies' Benevolent Society. As The Round Table reported:

> Nov. 29 the school boys and girls could be seen on the streets of Goldsboro going to the Opera House with food and clothing for the poor--perhaps for some poor little child in our school. Large tables on the stage and even the floor were piled with good presents, which were arranged by teachers, and ladies of the city...Thanksgiving Day, the ladies of the Ladies'

Benevolent Society kindly distributed the presents among the needy of our city.[16]

No formal Parents and Teachers Association existed at the school in the 1890s, but parents and outside organizations, such as the Ladies' Benevolent Society, heavily supported the school and worked to involve students in the activities and needs of the community. Both the men and women of the Weil family worked closely with school administrators and teachers and Gertrude grew up knowing her teachers as respected educators and friends of her family. She also appreciated the importance of her parents, aunts and uncles in creating and maintaining the educational jewel of North Carolina.

Mina Weil took a particularly strong interest in her children's educational progress and made some effort to keep up with innovations in teaching. In 1893, she wrote to Leslie, then attending the University of North Carolina, "I have almost concluded to take up studying again when baby Janet begins, and then I'll surely (?) be equal to the latest generation."[17] Leslie's mother teased him, observing that methods and material changed so rapidly that his education would also soon be outdated. Mina also showed special interest in Gertrude's education and reported to Leslie on his sister's study habits and abilities. As she observed, "Gertrude does not seem to be worried with her lessons, nor does she give me the impression that she is studying hard, but she studies most of the time she is out of school, except the first hour after dinner; I think she

tries not to over do it, for yesterday afternoon she was cycling for a while."[18] Concern for the academic achievements of a young girl was still very rare at this time, but Mina as a girl had preferred to continue her studies rather than marry at the first opportunity. There was also a precedence within the community and the Weil family for girls to secure a higher education. With this background and the support of her family, Gertrude successfully developed her scholastic skills which gained her acceptance in another unique progressive school of the century.

Gertrude's years at Goldsboro School left her with a positive impression of the intellectual potential of women which lasted throughout her life. Not only did many female graduates continue their education, but some of the best teachers at the school were women. During those years Gertrude had a favorite teacher, Mrs. Humphries, who previously taught in private schools in the North. She greatly admired her teacher and, while in New York, wrote Mrs. Humphries about what she was learning at Horace Mann and how she was progressing. The inspiration of this teacher and the young girl's desire to please her former mentor helped motivate Gertrude in her studies. Mrs. Humphries provided an early model of a confident, knowledgeable and capable working woman who had the respect of both the men and women of her community. By the time Gertrude left for New York, she had before her the examples of the teachers, graduates and active school mothers as well as the pride and hopes of Mina Weil.

When Gertrude graduated from public school she was familiar with large cities such as Baltimore and New York. She had often visited her grandparents, cousins, aunts and uncles who introduced Gertrude to their circles of friends. Albert Rosenthal, Mina's younger brother and an alumnus of the Goldsboro Graded School, graduated from Columbia University and, while living in New York City, persuaded the Weils to send Gertrude to high school there. Following his suggestion, the Weils enrolled Gertrude in Horace Mann School at Columbia Teachers College. Horace Mann was considered a "model school" of the time and served as a co-educational preparatory school as well as a teaching laboratory for the Teachers College. Gertrude had a cousin a year ahead of her at Horace Mann so the separation from family in the South was mitigated by her closeness to relatives in New York. Certainly Gertrude's parents were impressed with the reputation of Teachers College: "the highest pedagogic school in the world" according to comparative reports of teaching institutions.[19] Enrolling in the college preparatory or "classical" study which prepared students to pass entrance exams to colleges and "scientific schools," Gertrude studied mathematics, English, history, science, Latin, Greek, German and drawing.[20] In addition to adjusting to a new level of coursework, Gertrude had to learn to get along in the largest and most diverse city in the country. For a thirteen year old girl from North Carolina, this was an education in itself.

Mina and Henry rightly feared that their daughter might be homesick or feel lost in the city. To familiarize Gertrude with school life and her new environment, Albert and Mina reintroduced Gertrude to New York by visiting art museums, a cathedral, plays and the Fifth Avenue Temple. Returning to Goldsboro shortly after classes began, Mina was comforted in the months ahead by reports from New York relatives that Gertrude missed the family but seemed to be getting along. Henry Weil was nonetheless concerned about his daughter's safety, enough so to elicit a special note from Gertrude.

> Dear Papa, I forgot to tell you how careful I am when I go out - I go out very seldom alone & when I go at all, I remember that I am in N. York & am very careful & watchful - Please don't worry -
> Your own little girl
> [21]

Although her family missed her, the person most upset by Gertrude's move to New York was Susie Fulghum, Gertrude's childhood friend and "sweetheart." As many historians have discovered, it was very common for Victorian women, especially adolescent girls, to have affectionate relationships with each other and exchange letters filled with the language of romance, longing and passion.[22] The girls' relationship fits the description of nineteenth century romantic female friendships but also exemplifies the intense relationships Gertrude would have with women throughout her life. Susie's love for Gertrude also foreshadows the kinds of feelings Gertrude seemed to attract or engender in women. Susie's letters not only reveal a strong longing and affection for her absent friend but demonstrate a bond that would be recreated between Gertrude

and a number of her female friends in years to come:

> Indeed I wish we were together to kiss & hug and room together for the winter, wouldn't it be a dream...I do indeed long to see you - to hug & kiss - I wish I had you with me this minute to talk to & kiss & love....
>
> O my dear old chum...dear sweetheart. Be brave, keep up spirits, and the time will soon be past. Write in your spare time, in breathing spells when ever they come. With more imaginery hugs and kisses, (possibly chicken fights, - if we are not above them) go to bed and have dreams of your true friend (more than friends).
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Within the letters are hints that Gertrude must have written similar letters to Susie demonstrating something less than bravery and high spirits. There is also an indication of Susie's realization that they would soon outgrow their usual play and displays of affection.

Susie tried to persuade her parents to let her go to Teachers College, but the Fulghums would not send their daughter to New York that year. The relationship of the girls changed as Gertrude made friends with her classmates, and Susie began to take seriously her desire to become a primary school teacher. Although plans never materialized for Susie to come to New York, the intimate and affectionate relationships which the two girls shared remained a part of Gertrude's life. Her ability to inspire such devotion became a fundamental key to her influence in developing women's organizations, political action groups and coalitions.

Gertrude made friends quickly at her new school as fellow students helped her adjust to the unfamiliar surroundings. Because of the small size of the school, there were twenty in Gertrude's class, Teachers College and

Horace Mann students shared the new and "generally crowded" college library.[24] Rather than identifying herself with the preparatory school, Gertrude usually referred to her school as "Teachers College" and very briefly considered staying on after graduating from high school. In addition to studying and sharing classes with other students, Gertrude roomed with a girl from New York, Helen Chamberlain, who became a close friend, and the two developed an attachment similar to the relationship Gertrude had with Susie. Helen introduced her young Southern friend to the sites of the city and took her home to spend free weekends with the Chamberlain family. Gertrude maintained this relationship long after leaving New York and, as late as fifteen years after the girls met, she proved a loyal friend by helping Helen through a rough period of illness.

Although Gertrude maintained some characteristics of a child of the Victorian Era, many aspects of her education at Horace Mann challenged the traditional roles and expectations of nineteenth-century women. In addition to her classical studies, education some still considered inappropriate and unhealthy for women, Gertrude took elective courses that were quite non-traditional. In her second term, for example, Gertrude wrote her family that she had enrolled in a "Mechanical Drawing" course, innocently commenting to her father "I think of you, dear Papa, every time I use one of the instruments."[25] Another example of Gertrude's exposure to non-traditional influences was her

friendship with the widowed daughter of Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Margaret Stanton Lawrence. Lawrence taught physical education at Horace Mann and Teachers College in the 1890s and lived with her famous mother, a nationally known suffrage leader, during the years she taught in New York. In a college scrapbook, numerous articles recount unprecedented and remarkable displays of gymnastic stunts performed by Lawrence's students.[26] Writing home to her family, Gertrude mentioned going on an exhausting ten-mile bike ride with her gym teacher, Margaret Lawrence, and Lawrence's cousin.[27] This experience, in addition to numerous girls basketball games, gymnastic shows and gym classes, exposed Gertrude to new physical freedoms and activities for women.

Teachers College also implicitly, and sometimes overtly, challenged the traditional roles of women. In a well publicized ceremony in 1896, two women laid cornerstones at Barnard College.[28] The major New York papers and Outlook, a popular magazine of the time, gave special attention to the event because women rarely played central roles in public ceremonies. Other publicized programs presented during those years explored such topics as "Labor Problems," the Salvation Army, prison work, crime, poverty, charity, drink, unemployment and "Woman's Changing Form."[29] In a letter to her family, Gertrude described one of the lectures:

> The lecture on Tuesday was a talk by Mrs. Ballyngton Boothe. I never heard any one talk so beautifully. When she gets through you feel like

> joining the Volunteers first thing. She dwelt especially upon the prison work. She is certainly a wonderful woman, and since seeing and hearing her, I don't wonder that any body--prisoners or any body else--confides everything to her. At the reception of the Social Club afterward I had the honor of being presented & shaking hands with her.[30]

The experience of "seeing and hearing her" clearly impressed Gertrude and stirred her in a way that seems unusual for a young woman not raised in a time when women were frequent participants in the public sphere. The phrase, "confides everything to her," suggests an emotional response and the beginning of a special identification and comraderie with non-traditional women in school and women's clubs.

In addition to the influence of Teacher's College faculty members and lecturers, Gertrude met professional women outside the increasingly feminized field of education. The school physician, Dr. Caroline A. Cabot, who treated Gertrude for a spinal curvature, remained Gertrude's physician throughout her school years in New York and at Smith College.[31] Gertrude wrote her mother of how much she admired Cabot and that she had a strong "crush" on the doctor which lasted a few years.

During these formative years at Horace Mann, Mina encouraged her daughter to take advantage of educational opportunities, especially instructing her to concentrate on studying and avoid such feminine trivialities as fashion. Responding to Mina's request, Gertrude wrote detailed accounts of the work and activities of students and faculty. She followed the family rule of writing home at least three times a week and, through these letters, Mina vicariously

lived the life of a girl riding the crest of progressive education. While living at Teacher's College, Gertrude was not under a tight family reign, nor was she pressured at that stage of her life to think of marriage as the next step in her future. On the contrary, Mina directed her daughter to seek an even higher level of academic experience and by that supported an extremely controversial activity for women; many educators at the turn of the century charged that intellectual training made women dissatisfied with their "proper" roles as mothers and wives. As Gertrude considered her options upon graduating, Mina supported her daughter's innovative style of life and guided Gertrude in directions which departed from the very nineteenth century traditional female roles Mina had fulfilled.

NOTES

Introduction and Chapter I:

1. William H. Chafe. Women and Equality: Changing Patterns in American Culture, Oxford University Press, new York, 1977, pp. 26-27.

2. Ibid, pp. 27-29.

3. Marion Roydhouse. "The 'Universal Sisterhood of Women:' Women and Labor Reform in North Carolina 1900-1932." Ph.D dissertation, Duke University, 1980, p. 263.

4. Interview with Gertrude Weil conducted by Eli Evans in Goldsboro, N.C., 1970.

5. Moses Rountree. Strangers in the Land: The Story of the Tribe of Jacob Weil, Dorrance, Philadelphia, 1969, p. 16.

6. Interview with Mrs. Hilda Weil Wallerstein conducted by Sarah Wilkerson in Greensboro, N.C., 1983.

7. Letter to Henry Weil from David Oettinger, Dec. 25, 1873. Gertrude Weil Papers, The North Carolina Department of Archives and History, Raleigh, N.C. (Weil Papers)

8. Rountree, p 18.

9. Ibid, pp. 18-19.

10. John Barrett. The Civil War in North Carolina, The University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, 1963, p. 344.

11. "History of the Goldsboro Graded School," Round Table, Goldsboro, North Carolina, November 1893.

12. Ibid.

13. Julia Howell and Gertrude Weil, "Statistics of the Goldsboro Graded School," Round Table, December 22, 1893.

14. Ibid.

15. Round Table, December 8, 1893. The schoolgirl who was secretary of the club, Sally Kirby, later served as the Recording Secretary of the North Carolina Federation of Women's Clubs and help Gertrude to be chosen for executive offices.

16. Ibid.

17. Letter to Leslie Weil from Mina Weil, Sept. 29, 1893. Weil Papers.

18. Ibid.

19. New York Mail Express, Sept. 24, 1896. Found in a Teachers College scrapbook, Teachers College Archives, Columbia University, New York.

20. "Horace Mann School Announcement," Teachers College New York City, 1896-1897, pp. 5-7.

21. Letter to "dear Ones" from Gertrude Weil, Oct. 27, 1895. Weil Papers.

22. Steven Stowe. "The Thing, Not Its Vision: A Woman's Courtship and Her Sphere in the Southern Planter Class," Feminist Studies, 9, Spring 1983, p. 113-115.

23. Letters to Gertrude Weil from Susie Fulghum, Sept. 25, 1895 and October 22, 1895, Weil Papers.

24. Lawrence Cremin. A History of Teachers College Columbia University, Columbia University Press, N.Y., 1954.

25. Letter to "My own dear Ones" from Gertrude Weil, Feb. 28, 1896, Weil Papers.

26. New York Evening Sun, April 30, 1896, Teachers College Scrapbook.

27. Letter to "dear Ones" from Gertrude Weil, Oct. 23, 1896. Weil Papers.

28. New York Herald and the New York Times, Oct. 25, 1896 and Outlook, Oct. 30, 1896, Teachers College Scrapbook.

29. New York Times, Dec. 12, 1896, New York Tribune, Jan. 20, 1897 and Feb. 1, 1897, New York Sun, Feb. 21, 1897, Teachers College Scrapbook.

30. Letter to "dear Ones" from Gertrude Weil, Jan. 26, 1896. Weil Papers.

31. Letter to Mrs. Williams from Dr. Caroline A. Cabot, Feb. 9, 1896. Weil Papers.

CHAPTER II

The Smith College Years, 1897-1901

By the time Gertrude graduated from Horace Mann in 1897, no one in her family questioned that she would pursue a college career. Indeed, high quality college training was by this time an option for many women who desired to continue their education. Since the founding of the Seven Sisters colleges in the 1860s through the end of the century, women had the option, albeit limited, of obtaining higher education of the same caliber as their brothers. Patterned after such highly rated institutions as Harvard, Yale and Amherst, the curricula of these colleges strongly emphasized classical languages, literature, philosphy and science.[1] However, from the founding of the first women's colleges, there was great controversy as to what physical, mental and moral affects such rigorous education would have on women and how it would influence their abilities as wives and mothers. Even the physical design of Vassar (1865) and Wellesley (1875) reflected both concerns for the health of female students and fears that women might be corrupted by their new found freedom and intellectual stimulation.[2] Each college housed its classrooms, administrative offices, sleeping accomodations and dining halls in one mammoth

building, which minimized the climbing of stairs and enabled administrators to closely guard their students. Consistent with their goal of mirroring the standards of male colleges, the schools deemphasized the traditionally feminine studies of music and art. On the other hand, because this quality of education was relatively new to women, the schools maintained large preparatory departments to ready students for college level courses. When Gertrude chose a school in 1897, women's colleges were still in an experimental phase, searching for the best atmosphere and programs for educating women. It was not clear how four years spent in female centered academic communities would mold these first generations of graduates.

In the 1890s, few Southern women attended these Northern private women's colleges and those who did often felt uncomfortable with their Yankee classmates and Northern customs. For Gertrude, regional background did not seem to be a problem; in numerous ways she did not fit the mold of the stereotypic young Southern lady. Because of her religion, the absence of a deep Southern ancestral tie and the immigrant status of her parents, she did not have a strong regional identification. Growing up in the midst of rapid industrialization, Gertrude observed changes in Goldsboro similar to mill and factory towns in the northeast. Also, Gertrude's experiences in Baltimore and New York City, as well as her preparatory school education, enabled her to adjust to the cultural and social atmosphere of a Northern

college.

Although Henry and Mina Weil ordinarily encouraged their children to go to colleges close to home, most of the women's colleges and seminaries in the South were Christian denominational schools or public institutions which primarily offered normal and industrial courses. The Woman's College in Greensboro, North Carolina, a normal school attended by some Jewish and gentile women from Goldsboro, was not even considered because of its curriculum. In addition, like all state supported universities in North Carolina at that time, the school was under political fire from leaders of denominational colleges. The school had been created by the controversial fusion government of the early 1890s, and its doors had been open only a few years when Gertrude looked over colleges in 1896.[3]

In any case, Gertrude was most interested in private women's colleges in the North and visited several with her parents and discussed these with relatives. Her aunt and next-door neighbor, Sarah Einstein Weil, originally came from Boston and lobbied heavily for the women's college in Northampton, Massachusetts, Smith College. However, Mina disliked many of Sarah's extravagant and pretentious ways and did not want Gertrude to acquire unbecoming airs and ostentatious habits in New England. It is not clear where Mina wanted Gertrude to attend college, but she did not care much for Smith at first, and made it obvious that she did not. Nonetheless, Gertrude wrote a Smith administrator that she planned to take all the college entrance exams that

summer for the "Literary courses." On the rough draft of that letter, Gertrude experimented writing the names of three top women's colleges: Smith, Vassar and Wellesley. No matter which school Gertrude chose, Henry and Mina had agreed to abide by her decision. After passing the exams, Gertrude enrolled at Smith and moved back to the North, this time to Northampton, and began a more advanced phase of her academic career. With her enrollment in 1897, Gertrude became the first woman from North Carolina to go to Smith.

It was the intention of Smith's founder, Sophia Smith, to establish a college "to furnish for my sex means and facilities for education equal to those which are afforded now in our College to young men....It is not my design to render my sex any less feminine, but to develop as fully as may be the powers of womanhood & furnish women with means of usefulness, happiness, & honor now witheld from them."[4] Smith's reputation and popular appeal was built on this attitude which saw nothing inherently unsexing in education, but rather considered academic study an honorable and womanly pursuit. The college was known for intensive, serious-minded education and, unlike Vassar and Wellesley, offered no preparatory courses; all students had to be ready to meet the college's standards upon entering. Although Smith had a proud reputation for maintaining the same curriculum and academic standards as the best liberal arts men's colleges, its program included courses in art and music. These subjects were not treated as concessions to tradition but as

serious endeavors.[5] Gertrude had been schooled in drawing at both Goldsboro Graded School and Horace Mann and her family felt she was artistically talented. Smith's attention to the arts may have influenced her choice of the school.

The physical plan of Smith was also appealing for it did not follow the one building plan of Vassar and Wellesley; instead, a cottage system, or a system of home-like dormitories and many buildings for classrooms, laboritories, offices, etc., was used. To enable women from a variety of economic backgrounds to attend Smith, students were not required to room and board on campus but could find accomodations to fit their means and needs in town. This separation of students into private boarding houses and campus cottages made Smith less cloistered than other women's colleges and created a more private and homey atmosphere in which students lived, studied and developed relationships. The college appealed to so many young women in the late 1890s that it had the largest female enrollment of any college in the world. When Gertrude entered in 1897, she was one of more than 1,000 students attending the college.

In addition to giving Gertrude a fine liberal arts education, Smith prepared her for effective leadership roles in women's clubs and political action groups. First, her college education placed her in an unfamiliar environment among women with backgrounds very different from hers. In the future, her practiced adaptability and social grace would serve Gertrude in good stead. Second, she developed an

independence of thought and action which enabled her to pursue non-traditional, and sometimes radical, courses divorcing herself from opinions and desires of her family. Third, the academic challenges and course materials not only exposed Gertrude to political and social issues but taught her how to study problems in order to find solutions. This intellectual training took place in a female centered community which engendered respect for women's abilities in the private and public spheres. Students at Smith not only learned to appreciate their own potential but the individual and collective potential of women.

At Smith, Gertrude learned to get along with women from a variety of backgrounds and regions. Like all the Seven Sisters colleges prior to the 1910s, Smith was largely attended by middle-class women, women from prosperous and middle income families who were not likely to send their daughters to European boarding and finishing schools. The myth of the affluent and frivolous college girl did not prevail at that time. During the late 1890s, there was enough need for financial aid for poorer Smith students that special scholarship and loan funds were established. President Clark Seelye, in his history of the college, considered the creation of these funds a proud accomplishment.[6] Gertrude had many close friends who went to Smith in hopes of acquiring an education which would enable them to get jobs and support themselves if necessary. In addition, Gertrude was introduced to a variety of Smith students from all over the country. In Lawrence House, where Gertrude stayed her junior

and senior years, there were women from every New England state as well as Chicago, Kansas City, Washington, D.C., New Jersey, Iowa, Ohio, and New York.[7]

Gertrude also learned to adapt to new physical and academic surroundings. During her first months at college, she adjusted to the small town atmosphere of Northampton, and a few things about life at Smith seemed to surprise her. As she described a scene to her family, "Everything that is connected with Smith College is dark and quiet at ten o'clock. Even the dances close promptly."[8] Unexpectedly, most students at the freshman "Frolic" wore informal clothing: "shirt waists and white skirts or anything else light and simple."[9] From the running track above the gymnasium floor, Gertrude observed the throng of hundreds of college girls, a sight she described to her mother as beautiful and impressive. She counted only ten or so men at the dance and did not seem to find the sparse male attendance odd but simply noteworthy since all school dances, with the annual exception of the Promenade, were usually attended only by women. In fact, such large gatherings of women were rare in Gertrude's experience because both Horace Mann and Goldsboro Public School had been coeducational institutions.

This extensive homosocial community of Smith College was itself an important feature of Gertrude's education. The graduating classes of 1900 and 1901 were the largest classes of women ever graduated from any institution of higher education in history. At Smith, Gertrude lived in a world

largely administered and peopled by educated women. The college President and some instructors were men, but those having the closest contact with students were the students themselves, female teachers, deans and house mothers. Even though women's colleges continually fought critics who suggested that rigorous education "unsexed" women, in the confines of the school, female students were not made to feel odd or unwomanly for pursuing their degrees. Rather, there emerged a strong and unprecedented brand of female solidarity, a unity built on hard work toward intellectual and personal development. This unique comraderie did not disappear on graduation day, but continued to unite the women in women's clubs and civic organizations long after they had received their diplomas. Gertrude was only one of many graduates of the first generation of college educated women to carry this solidarity into the larger fields of social reform and politics through women's clubs.

At Smith, Gertrude also learned to live independently of her family and not be so strictly influenced by her mother. With many more people and ideas within her reach and no relatives close by, she faced problems and made decisions on her own. She continued to write home three times a week but began to ask for advice less frequently and, instead, to share more of the interesting experiences of school life. Perhaps for this reason, Mina tried all the harder to influence her daughter through thrice weekly letters from Goldsboro. As Gertrude became accustomed to her new environment, her responses to Mina's reprimands and authoritative

suggestions became more off-handed, respectful but not serious. It was clear that she was thinking for herself and perhaps not always sharing the same opinions and expectations as her mother.

However, Gertrude still listened to Mina and often cooperated with her mother's wishes. Regardless of how much she learned in school, Gertrude was still financially dependent on her family and had to clear many expenditures with her parents. These requests gave Mina opportunities to moralize and control her daughter. For example, Mina became concerned with what she considered an excessive interest in clothes. Shortly after her arrival at Smith, Gertrude wrote Mina that "bicycle skirts," similar to culottes, were not only popular on campus but useful. Mina gladly had a pair made and sent to her daughter. However, as Gertrude began to notice new fashions and make more requests, Mina informed her that she would not pander to such vanities. As Mina wrote, "It seems to me there are so many things at Smith more important than dress, that it is better to use your money where most needed while there is no need for you to look shabby, it will not hurt you to contrive a little about clothes, when you are given so many real and lasting pleasures."[10] Evidently Mina wanted to discourage her daughter from becoming superficial, vain and vapid and instead take advantage of the tremendous opportunities open to young college women which she had been denied.

What Mina called "real and lasting pleasures" were the

intellectually stimulating aspects of college, and the Smith College girl did not lack for these. In letters to her family, Gertrude frequently mentioned her work in art, composition and German but the subjects she enjoyed most were "Ethics and Economics."[11] These courses were first introduced into the Smith catalog in 1899 and were a major departure from the college's classical emphasis on literature, rhetoric, arts, sciences and languages. Nonetheless, political economics was a growing field and, like the best men's colleges, Smith tried to keep up with new fields of inquiry. Economics courses seemed to have been central in awakening Gertrude's social consciousness and guiding her understanding of the relationships between economics and social conditions; here were nourished the political opinions that would impel her to work for equal suffrage for women and political and social reforms. In these classes, Gertrude gained experience discussing the status of women as well as economic systems in an atmosphere open to the opinions of women. The discussions were carried out of the classroom and reinforced by special speakers and the activities of campus organizations.

A class in political economics had as its main theme how the capitalistic economic system worked to create and perpetuate poverty. A sample list of course books suggest the content of the course: Influence of Women on the Progress of Knowledge (Henry Thomas Buckle), How the Other Half Lives (Jacob Riis), Prisoners of Poverty (Helen Campbell), Cry of the Children (Elizabeth Barrett Browning), Poverty,

Its Genesis and Exodus (Godard), Unto the Last (Ruskin), Workers in the West (Wocuff),and Problems of Poverty. In one unit, the instructor gave a detailed outline to demonstrate that "Poverty is Preventable." The "solution" centered on political, industrial and social reforms specifically calling for the socialization of industry, adult suffrage for men and women, an eight hour work day, population control, heavy taxation of unearned income, "Abolition of System of Capital," "Collective Ownership of Capital," "Socialising of Distribution," "Restriction of Military Expenditure," "Collective Ownership of Industry doing away with war for sake of private profit," equitable distribution of land and wealth, "Development of National Education Movement," "Disendowment of the Church," and equal pay for equal work.[12]

Judging from Gertrude's class notes, one of the most intriguing set of lectures dealt with the economic status of women and "Schemes of Reform in Women's Wages"--basically a series of women's history lectures. The notes outlined the breaking of the family unit by industrialization, the subsequent importance of the family wage system and historic male and upper-class dominance apparent in the unfair wage system. After outlining and refuting commonly accepted reasons for maintaining low wages of women, the lecturer moved immediately to the theories of Aveling, Marx and Engels. The lecturer also offered direct and immediate ways to meet the problem of the wage differential: strengthening of women's trade unions, "political emancipation" of women and the

"Suffusion of Economic Knowledge Among Women." The lecturer seemed to consider the political economics class a personal statement and an effort to improve the status of women by raising the consciousness of his female students making them aware of their particularly vulnerable positions in society.

These lectures challenged the status quo by questioning the necessity of poverty and inequitable distributions of wealth. In exploring the role of women and their wages in the marketplace, it was made clear to the students that women were paid much less than men and that women's wages artificially held down the wages of working-class men. This unfair treatment of women contributed to the larger problems of across the board low pay for unskilled workers and labor unrest. As long as women were second-class citizens with no real political power, poverty and social injustice would remain. Poverty was the key to most social problems of the time such as overcrowded slums, disease, illiteracy, prostitution and crime. According to the lectures, none of these problems could be adequately solved until women had full rights. While taking this course in her senior year, Gertrude became an avowed suffragette.

Sociology courses also embraced controversial topics with the same evidence of engagement that characterized those in economics. A course on "Socialism and Social Reform" was taught by Charles F. Emerick who also taught a course on "Some Sociological Problems: Causes of Degeneracy; the Treatment of Dependents and Delinquents" with "[p]articular attention...given to the study of organized chari-

ties." Professor Henry L. Moore taught a course entitled "Some Problems of Poverty: The Unemployed; the Employment of Women and Children; the Housing of the Poor; Social Settlements." In addition, courses were offered in "American Commercial and Industrial Policy" and "The History and Theory of Trusts."[13]

Not only did Gertrude study social problems through classes and books, but in April 1901 she took a trip to New York City and saw settlement houses and immigrant neighborhoods for herself. Writing home about the experience, Gertrude told her family of her visit to the "Friendly Aid" Settlement. Mrs. Mary Kingsbury Simkhovitch, a nationally known settlement house worker and head of Friendly Aid, spoke to students in Northampton and invited them to a tea at the settlement.[14] A large number of Smith girls attended. After tea, one of the male residents took fifteen to twenty girls to the Italian, Chinese and Jewish quarters. As Gertrude described the excursion: "We didn't get to Hester or Rivington Sts., but we went through Division St., where the hat stoves are. It was fine to have somebody that knew all about things to point them out to us. We saw Mulberry Bend and Five Points, and other things that [Jacob] Riis tells about. He doesn't describe the Italians as a bitt [sic] dirtier than they are. They are filthy!"[15] The young ladies made their way through the crowded streets while local people stared and jeered. As Gertrude recalled, "The funniest remarks were made at us on all sides as we passed by.

I don't wonder that we were as big a show to them as they to us. The most frequent appellation was 'teachers.' The streets were sometimes so crowded that we had to go single file as we reached nearly half a square from beginning to end of the procession." The group then wound its way to Lillian Wald's Henry Street Settlement where, as Gertrude remarked, "a number of trained nurses live, who give their work to the poor people around them."[16]

From Gertrude's letter it is clear that she was well acquainted with major points of attraction, such as Hester and Rivington Streets, and related what she learned in her classes to what she saw around her. Whether the college girls realized there was a tour of settlement neighborhoods planned for them is unclear. What is important is that Gertrude did see these neighborhoods at the height of overcrowding, poverty and unsanitary living conditions. This experience brought to life the problems she studied in economics and enabled her to see firsthand the realities of poverty and the importance of social service.

In addition to the direct influence of courses and extra-curricular activities, Smith College sponsored special programs and lectures designed to affect the social and political consciousnesses of its students. During the same term as her Political Economics class, Gertrude again encountered the reformer who strongly impressed her some years before at Teachers College.

> Mrs. Ballington Brooks was fine last night - She spoke to prison reform work - about the same thing that I remember hearing her say at Teachers Col-

> lege three or four years ago. Then she had just started it, now she has been at it about five years. She is a most magnetic speaker with wonderfully moving voice and eyes, that express her own deep feelings and excite her audience in the same way.
> [17]

This second presentation reinforced Gertrude's first impression of the female reformer. Her enthusiasm for the speaker seems unchanged and again suggests an emotional response of warm admiration. These feelings for women publicly engaged in valiant reforms did not extinguish during Gertrude's years at Smith, but, instead, grew as she began actively to emulate them and support their causes.

Exposure to politics and social issues not only came through Gertrude's affiliation with Smith College but also from residents of Northampton. Contrary to common belief, life at Smith for students in the 1890s was not as cloistered as some historians posit. There was a great deal of day to day interaction between local people and students. Many Smith girls boarded and roomed in off-campus homes run by townspeople and were thereby introduced to families and visitors outside the campus community. Gertrude had a particularly interesting living situation her first year at college. For the school year of 1897-1898, she boarded at the home of Miss Mary Louise Cable, the sister of the Southern iconoclast and author, George Washington Cable, who was also a resident of the town. In numerous letters home, Gertrude recounted interesting evenings spent with Miss Cable and visitors including her famous brother.

George Cable's influence on this young Southern woman

was reinforced through a club he founded in Northampton called the Home-Culture Club, an organization which gathered people from all classes together in private homes. The twofold purpose of the club was to "help the individual to a broader culture and to improve the intellectual, moral and social atmosphere of his home," and to "bring together in their own homes people whom the ordinary forces of society tend dangerously to separate."[18] Gertrude had a strong crush on the General Secretary of the club, Miss Adelene Moffat, and joined up as a "leader," or volunteer teacher, in order to be under her guidance and in her favor. Once a week, Gertrude taught the rudiments of education to a small group of working class youngsters. She often wrote home telling about the Home-Culture teas and classes and seemed proud and happy with her efforts. When Mina Weil began to formulate the Woman's Club in Goldsboro, she wrote to her daughter for advice and Gertrude responded: "I had already thought on instituting a Home Culture Club in Goldsboro. It would be a splendid thing if it once got going--if people knew what it means...The thing of it is--you are dealing with people so different when you tackle the poor uneducated of a New England college town & those of a small Southern town. I never saw people so eager to learn as [the people here] are."[19] Gertrude asked Miss Moffat to send some literature on the club to Mina and by that established a link between the club movement taking shape in Goldsboro and the Home-Culture Club of George Washington Cable. The women's clubs Gertrude came home to in 1901 had already felt her influence and

their ideas and purposes would be quite familiar to her.

National politics as well as economics and social problems found its way to Smith College during the 1900 presidential campaign. In a letter to her family, Gertrude described one of her first encounters with the political system:

> After the excitement of a trip to Springfield and the presidential election, I again rescue my pen--dropped some three days ago.
> What do you think of the election? Things up here were as exciting and excited as if we were all men of age. We had a regular election for college girls--conducted in the exact same way as the real ballot-boxes. The printed rules for voting were posted and we went into the voting rooms one by one--after being inspected by the police at the door and giving our names to the clerk. The results were 761 for McKinley against 73 for Bryan. I am glad its finally over - I'm so everlastingly tired of hearing girls talk politics and the method of Electing president, and the probability of their staying in college in the case of Bryan's election and the fall of stocks. I suppose that now at least after a few days the air won't be so full of such discussion. I am glad, though, that I know how the president gets Elected and a few more things about political methods that the campaign has forced upon me.
> 20

In her letter, Gertrude never indicated whether she voted for the Democrat Bryan or the Republican McKinley. But it was clear from her description that the mock election introduced the girls to the political process including pre-election discussions ad nauseum. After this experience, students from equal suffrage states would go home to exercise what they learned; those from states not granting women the vote, such as North Carolina, would leave Smith with a growing awareness that the political process was not far beyond their reach.

After four years at Smith, Gertrude had learned much to put to practice. She had been exposed to the settlement house movement and introduced to active female reformers. Living and studying with women from many regions and class backgrounds, Gertrude had learned to adapt to both new surroundings and people. In this academic setting far from home, she developed ideas and opinions independent of her family's influence. Her abilities to think, study and solve problems had been honed and challenged in her classes. Most importantly, all of these aspects of her education had been executed in an atmosphere receptive to women and respectful of their intelligence. She had grown accustomed to working with women and depended on them for intellectual stimulation and emotional support. Like many 1901 graduates from the Seven Sisters colleges, a special comraderie existed between Gertrude and her friends as they left the rarefied atmosphere of their college for a world not so tolerant of women's views and desires and even less receptive of women's involvement in the traditionally male business of politics.

Both the effective homosocial community and class lessons at Smith set the stage for Gertrude's future work in North Carolina's women's clubs. Her commitments to suffrage work, social service and women's issues all reflected the basic relationships between economics and human conditions, especially the status of women, she had studied at school. She firmly believed that as long as women were economically oppressed, men, women and children would suffer; as long as

women were politically impotent they would remain economically oppressed. Working with other committed women to change this and other social conditions, Gertrude found the comraderie and intellectual stimulation she had enjoyed at Smith. In women's clubs she also found a place to air her opinions and turn her thoughts and words to action as an elected representative and leader of the state's women.

Chapter II:

1. Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz. Alma Mater, Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 1984, pp. 3, 28.

2. Ibid, pp. 3-5.

3. Helen G. Edmonds. The Negro and Fusion Politics in North Carolina, 1894-1901, The University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, 1951.

4. Horowitz, p. 70.

5. L. Clark Seelye. History of Smith College, 1871-1910, Houghton Mifflin Company, New York, 1923, pp. 164.

6. Ibid, pp. 107-8.

7. Smith College Catalogue, 1900-1901, Smith College, Northampton, Massachusetts, p. 92-98.

8. Letter to "dearest Papa, Mamma and Leslie" from Gertrude Weil, Sept. 26, 1897. Weil Papers.

9. Ibid.

10. Letter to Gertrude Weil from Mina Weil, Oct. 30, 1897. Weil Papers.

11. Letter to "Dear Ones" from Gertrude Weil, n.d. 1900?. Weil Papers.

12. These notes are in the Smith College notebooks and themes file of the Weil Papers, Political Economics, 1901. The notes quoted here are only a small representative portion which indicate how class materials, readings and lectures introduced the Smith students to unconventional ideas. A significant percentage of middle and upper class female reformers of the early twentieth century attended the Seven Sisters Colleges. I believe that the reform impetus of many of these women can be traced to, or was heavily influenced by, their academic introduction to politics, economics and history in their college classes. The degree to which these classes helped politicize the women has received only slight attention by historians and much more work needs to be done on the subject.

13. Smith College Catalogue, pp. 36-37.

14. Letter to "Dear Ones" from Gertrude Weil, April 8, 1901. Weil Papers.

15. Ibid.

16. Ibid.

17. Letter to "Dear Ones" from Gertrude Weil, Nov. 17, 1900. Weil Papers.

18. Adelene Moffat, general secretary, "The Home-Culture Clubs," n.d. (1897), n.p.

19. Letter to "Dear Ones from Gertrude Weil, November, 16, 1898. Weil Papers.

20. Letter to Mina Weil from Gertrude Weil, Nov. 4, 1900. Weil Papers.

CHAPTER III

Early Involvement in Women's Clubs: The Decisive Years, 1901-1914

With the dawn of the twentieth century, the phenomenon of women's clubs took on the appearance and momentum of a movement; at that precise juncture, the Gertrude began the difficult process of determining her future. The traditional thing for women to do at this point in their lives was to marry, however, Gertrude had already broken traditions by spending so much of her youth in school and college. While going through the waiting period of her twenties, she filled her time with women's club activities, travel and socializing. The rise of women's organizations and Gertrude's new freedom also coincided with a growing dissatisfaction with the country's sexually discriminatory political system and a resurgence of the women's movement. During the Progressive Era, Gertrude, like many college educated women, came of age through organized efforts to treat social problems previously studied in college. The experiences and relationships formed in this critical phase of her life determined her future emergence as a political activist and feminist.

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The class of 1901 entered Smith College at the end of the Victorian Era and emerged from campus into the vibrant atmosphere of a new millenium and the Progressive Era. The lives of these graduates promised to be quite different from that of their mothers. Encouraged by their college experiences, the graduates looked beyond the domestic sphere, challenged old traditions, and relied on each other for moral support. A small number of these women entered male dominated professions and even more were drawn to new and rapidly expanding positions in social service and business.[1] More women of all classes entered the labor force than in any previous period in history and began earning money to support themselves, their aging parents and their families. Having to depend less and less on husbands and male relatives for financial support, this generation of women experienced a new economic freedom and independence. However, breaking from tradition and finding one's way into new fields was not easy even for the young, hopeful and advantaged college graduate.

Gertrude, like many educated women of her time, wanted to put her training to use in the outside world. Shortly before graduation, she announced to her family that she wanted to teach kindergarten. This meant she would probably leave Goldsboro since most schools in the country did not yet have kindergarten programs and the Goldsboro school already had a teacher. Writing to her family, Gertrude voiced her desire to help "needy" people by educating the

very young. Responding to the letter, Mina contested Gertrude's ambitions:

> Your letter regarding work I have read and thought over. I think now we are selfish enough to want you at home for awhile (I can see the disadvantage of the little town) and I think if you look for it you can find something to do that will benefit a very needy class here. We have no manual training of any sort in our graded school, so it seems to me if you can arrange to teach some drawing and sewing perhaps to the lower grades the school would be better for it and you too. I want you to have some regular work when you once get home or you will be lost after fifteen years of knowing what each day held for you.[2]

She further suggested that Gertrude try her artistic skills and look into careers in book frontpiece design, as Mina explained, "it sounds like pleasant work and I would just like to know that you could earn if necessary. I have a horror of a helpless girl and a dependent one."

There are a number of possible reasons why Mina advised her daughter to learn a marketable trade. Even though women of the Weil's social class did not have to work for financial reasons, for centuries Jewish women in Eastern Europe worked to support their households while their husbands spent their days in religious study. Families immigrating to the United States found it all the more necessary to have both the husband and wife earn money. Mina's mother, Eva Rosenthal, was no exception and worked beside her husband tending their store in Wilson, North Carolina. Although Mina did not work at H. Weil & Brothers, Eva's example made it easier for Mina to advise Gertrude to learn a trade. In addition, Mina's reasons may have stemmed from memories of the Civil War and the particular hardships women endured

directly after the war. Having also lived through three depressions and, with the 1890s panic afresh in memory, she may have desired more security in the form of self-reliance for Gertrude. An occupation for her daughter could be a hedge against future destitution, dependency and disaster. Dealing in charity, Mina saw plenty of cases of "helpless women" who depended on welfare assistance to support themselves and their families.

In any case, Mina got her way and Gertrude came back to live in Goldsboro after graduation. For a short time Gertrude worked in the H. Weil & Brothers store under Henry's supervision. In a letter to her daughter, Mina explained: "I hope you like to do the work Papa assigns you - it may not seem quite as good to you as if you knew exactly what you are to do in the future, but it will prove your metal and may be in the end you will find it the very best thing for you to have done at this period of your life."[3] In addition to these tasks, she assisted her mother with maintaining the household. As Gertrude explained to a family biographer years later, Mina was "feeble" and needed her care. Although Mina did have some health problems, she was hardly "feeble;" however, Gertrude's presence eased her workload and gave her more free time.

She did not openly rebel against her mother's insistance on keeping her at home, but Gertrude had little enthusiasm for the work Mina assigned and contrived to travel almost continually and at such a frantic pace that friends

and family complained they could not keep track of her whereabouts. In 1903 and again in 1905 she toured Europe with old college friends, rarely appearing anxious to return home. Frequently visits to relatives in New York and Baltimore who properly introduced her to "Society" made her more sociable and sophisticated. Assuring Mina that she would hardly believe her daughter's new found social graces, Gertrude wrote: "Oh, I tell you, you wouldn't recognise this much-politic and tactful society lady for the same Thompson-rebuffer that you have always known. I am coming. I am trying to follow out your numerous injunctons, dear Mamma...."[4] On other occasions she was less sanguine: "Life has been flying by with such rapid flight--and more than that, has been filled with feelings of such dread terror and misgivings, that I haven't been able to express myself. Now--however, the crucial Experience has been undergone and I breathe a prayer of Thanksgiving that I live, a survivor of the ordeal.--I have been to my first Ball."[5]

Although she had good times at these functions, Gertrude quickly became disillusioned with the social whirl and especially with expectations for women:

> I'm afraid I was never intended for a sporty life. This dissipation is too much for me. If my face looks this morning as it feels, it must have a haggard expression....I have made many observations of Society--some of them tickle my sense of humor almost to the laughing point. How a girl can do nothing but this and look forward to nothing but this is beyond my understanding. In the mean time, Gertrude is having the best time in the world--when the fun isn't from the inside it's from without, and it's almost as funny....I couldn't tell you all the Silly things that Society uttered that evening. I suppose this is what

girls grow to womanhood for.[6]
Clearly, Gertrude was not happy with the social prescriptions which dictated what "girls grow up to womanhood for." During her youth, a girl grew to womanhood to marry and raise children. The question of marriage itself was a foregone conclusion; the real question was who would be her mate, since a woman's social status and financial security was primarily determined by her marriage partner.

The opportunity for Gertrude to marry may never have presented itself for there is no evidence that any formal proposals of marriage were made. Choosing to go back to Goldsboro restricted Gertrude's choice of possible mates, and as a young Jewess it would have been difficult for her to marry out of her faith. The number of eligible Jewish men in North Carolina was small and, by the time she graduated and resettled, it was already late for her to marry by the day's standards. When Moses Rountree, the Weil family biographer, asked Gertrude in the 1960s why she had never married, he received an unexpected and biting reply, "Nobody wanted me." In fact, Gertrude's standards for those she let close to her were admittedly high. In her later years, Gertrude indicated that she would have liked to marry but knew of only two people with whom she could stand to eat three meals a day: one was her brother and the other a close female friend.

As a young woman, Gertrude had not spent her time refining "feminine" charms in order to attract a husband. Although she was attractive and a few men made courting

gestures, many who met her described her manner as "unconventional;" to the dismay of some of her college mates she bucked convention by refusing to wear a corset. In valentines and letters, Gertrude's friends and family alluded to her pleasant Southern voice and good sense of humor as well as her insistance on voicing her will; she was opinionated, outspoken and frequently blunt in her observations but not unkind or insensitive. She preferred discussions on good literature and social issues to small talk. But in spite of some disregard for convention, Gertrude had been raised in the Victorian Era and her methods of handling suitors reflected this. Even after years of attentive and warm correspondance with an interested young man, she was careful to maintain a proper and discrete distance from him in both her personal contact and written messages.

Although Gertrude could not have known it at this period in her life, her remaining single was not exceptional; as statistics later showed, more than seventy percent of Seven Sisters graduates in Gertrude's generation did not marry.[7] Like many educated, elite women, Gertrude looked more to women than to men for the emotional support most associated with romantic relationships and marriage. Her reliance on strong female bonding for love and affection carried over from her school days into adulthood. Moreover, she elicited strong emotions from many women, receiving throughout her life letters from female admirers romantically declaring their affections. The language of some of these

letters is so effusive, and almost sexual, that in the 1980s they would be interpreted as homosexual expressions of desire. Indeed, Gertrude tried to discourage these women from writing such "personal" thoughts and there is no evidence to indicate the existance of sexual relationships. In fact, these very women articulated the fear that someday she would marry and no longer have time for them.

As Gertrude matured, she maintained the same strong homosocial relationship patterns developed at Smith. In addition to keeping her devotion and affection for old school friends, Gertrude developed intimate bonds with local educated women. Her best friends not only offered intellectual stimulation and companionship but supported her interest in social reform through women's clubs. Her close friends in Goldsboro were especially instrumental in propelling her career in the club movement. For Gertrude, her undeniable charismatic appeal and ability to interest and inspire women on both personal and professional levels were attributes to be used in pursuit of the radical social changes she desired.

By the time Gertrude was determining her future, the country had witnessed a growing emphasis on women's work, independence and desires to effect social change. Interest in the Settlement House Movement, inspired by Jane Addams's Hull House, grew to such proportions that nearly every major city had at least one neighborhood settlement house. Women worked as house residents to improve, in self-prescribed fashions, the conditions of working-class and poor immigrant

neighborhoods. These efforts were considered an extension of woman's traditional role of caretaker and mother and this justified their attempts to clean up slums, better sanitation and tend the health of neighborhood children. At this time women also began to form literary and cultural clubs restricted to female members. By creating organizations independent from male clubs, women controlled their own funds and determined their own programs of speakers, therefore, no opportunities existed for men to impose discriminatory restrictions on female members. At the same time, the 1893 Chicago World's Fair included in its design a Women's Building to showcase and celebrate the accomplishments of women from all over the country. The publicity for this exhibition further drew public attention to the activities and abilities of women. These national trends, in addition to the growing call for women's suffrage in Great Britain and the United States, created an atmosphere in which women from even the most conservative regions of the country could start their own women's clubs with the idea of benefitting themselves and their communities.

In Goldsboro, Mina Weil had felt the influence of the women's club movement and was exposed to politics and female reformers. Together with news of local boys joining the fight of the Spanish-American War, Mina wrote Gertrude of Charlotte Perkins Stetson Gilman's visit to Goldsboro in 1898: "Mrs. Stetson delivered her second lecture last night, it was well attended and she entertained her audience--her

subject was the 'New Woman' though she did not so please she spoke of the development of women in many ways in [the 19th] century. While I don't agree with her in all things I enjoy attending the lectures. She reads apropos things from her poems and reads them well too."[8] Gilman's talks sponsored by the Goldsboro Ladies' Benevolent Society "obtained for her an imperishable admiration." As the Goldsboro Argus reported on the day Gilman left town: "[Gilman's] ready activity of thought generated by a love of life and a true realization of what should be the objects and aims of life, coupled with her instinctive knowledge of the passion of the human heart and her observations of worldly affairs, made her lectures interesting and instructive and filled the minds of her auditors with wonder and admiration."[9]

In direct response to Gilman's influence, the Goldsboro Woman's Club was established in 1899 and dedicated to Charlotte Perkins Gilman. When Mina Weil called the first organizational meeting of the club, the event caused a stir in the community. A reporter quoted Mina at the time saying, "a small group of men, gathered outside as the women came out of the building, predicted dire things now that women had organized and said: 'They'll be wanting the vote next and that will be too dreadful.'"[10] Although there had been other Goldsboro women's clubs in existence since at least the 1860s, these were Jewish women's clubs which raised funds to support the synagogue, an orphanage and needy families in the community. The Gilman inspired Goldsboro Woman's Club promised to be more secular and possibly political in its

concerns. The group consisted of both gentiles and Jews and concentrated its initial efforts on literary study, home economics, nutrition and health. Certainly there was some credence to the men's fears since the women, working their responsibility for the health and safety of their families, soon began to push for civic improvements.

Not only did Mina organize the women's club, but to head off criticism she gathered the opinions of respected people to determine its guidelines and purposes. One person she consulted was the President of the University of North Carolina, Edwin Alderman. Alderman got his start as superintendent of the Goldsboro School and knew Mina and the other women of the town quite well. In a letter to Mina, Alderman made important suggestions:

> make your club a sort of Sorosis [the first women's club in the United States--primarily a literary club] and by means of their suggestive schemes work out your own problems. I would concentrate on some one tangible thing like a public library and fight that to a finish. One great good like that set on foot would give the Club a dignity and power that no man could gainsay.
>
> As to a course of study, Mr. Gladstone when asked what he thought of this century said that he thought its motto should be "Unhand me" so prolific it had been in all sorts of freedom.
>
> Freedom for Women
> Freedom for childhood
> Political freedom
> Industrial freedom
> Freedom of the Press
> Social Freedom
>
> Could not these ideas be appropriately worked up as the Century wears to its close.
>
> 11

Alderman's response is most intriguing. He suggests that the women's club first justify its existence through service to the community: establish "a dignity and power that no man

could gainsay." By their service, the women would create a power base enabling them to take on more volatile social and political issues such as the rights of women, children and industrial workers. Considering the work of the Goldsboro Woman's Club and the important roles Goldsboro women played in the North Carolina Federation of Women's Clubs and the Equal Suffrage League, Alderman's 1899 letter articulated the same ideas already motivating the women. In the mean time, the Goldsboro Public Library was opened in 1907 as "a lasting testimonial to the Woman's Club"--certainly a contribution "no man could gainsay."[12]

By the time Gertrude came home to Goldsboro, Weil family women had become avid supporters of the women's club movement. Guided by Gilman's philosophies, as presented in Women and Economics and other works, the women met to discuss economic aspects of their roles and responsibilities, especially more communal ways of raising children and running households. This increased acceptance of women's clubs by the older Weil women, and their willingness to study and reevaluate the position of women, set the stage for Gertrude's future place in the organizations.

When at home during her first years out of college, Gertrude worked to bring cultural activities to the small town and raised money for charity by organizing and performing in theatrical productions. In much the same spirit as Settlement House self-help classes, she also taught a "little sewing class for women who were very poor,

mill workers" as part of her work in the Goldsboro Woman's Club. (In later years Gertrude remarked that she learned more from the experience than her students.) In women's clubwork she seemed to find the occupation for which she had been searching and showed an especially strong interest in organizations with definite goals of social reform. Through correspondance with her mother and friends, Gertrude kept informed of club news and events. Her interest in social work and reform grew rapidly and she began to concentrate her efforts in the North Carolina Federation of Women's Clubs, the state club affiliated with the national organization the General Federation of Women's Clubs.

The state Federation was established in 1902 through the long efforts of Sallie Southall Cotten. The club's motto was "The Union of All for the Good of All," and, as this implied, Cotten wanted to create a cohesive bloc of the state's women. Proclaiming her objective, Cotten observed that "The club movement has more nearly brought a realization of the dream of a united womanhood than anything yet known to the world...."[13]

Since the late nineteenth century Cotten worked to bring the accomplishments and needs of women to the public eye. She was one of the state's "lady managers" on the Women's Building committee at the 1893 Chicago World's Fair and a speaker and organizer at the National Congress of Mothers convention in 1896. Although not a resident of Goldsboro, Cotten strongly supported the formation of the town's Woman's Club, one of the largest and most successful

in the state. Conversely, the clubwomen of Goldsboro, worked to establish other women's clubs and coordinate these into the Federation. Cotten frequently held up the work of the Goldsboro club as an example of the good women could do if they united to improve their communities.

Indeed, women's clubs throughout the state effectively brought women together to educate themselves, improve schools and sanitation, study current issues and community problems and publicize the concerns for the health and development of children. The club women carried out their work under the assumption that such deeds came within the realm of woman's traditional role as caretaker of her family. Whether a woman was married and a mother was not important in clubwork, especially since young middle-class single women tended to have more free time to give to outside activities. By virtue of their sex all women were thought to be endowed with nurturing instincts and therefore naturally concerned with the healthy development of children. Unified by their concerns, club women emphasized the importance of educating themselves to be better mothers and acting collectively to expand their knowledge and impact. In order to give children the best environment in which to grow, women had to reach out from their homes to pinpoint and remedy unhealthy elements in the larger community. Although the women's club work was implicitly political, it was also a logical extension or "perfection" of the traditional female role.

In the early years, the women's clubs did not get involved in politics. Rather, as leader of the clubs, Cotton made it clear to politicians that she considered her husband her best political representative. The federated clubs worked for social reforms such as services for infants and mothers, better working conditions for women and children and reform of public education. Through club meetings and local papers, the Federation endorsed legislative acts it favored. Although the Federation women did not agree to support controversial women's suffrage and equal rights amendments, over the years they discovered that effective reform necessitated their increased involvement in state and local politics. As the Federation grew, members elected to leadership positions acquired experience with the political process and knowledge of social welfare movements outside North Carolina. A shift in leadership in 1908 indicated the growing interest and acceptance of a younger breed of women with different backgrounds and expectations than the older guard. By the 1920s, the club became more forthright in its objectives, as one clubwoman wrote: "The work in the Federation consists in stimulating an interest by helping to make women factors in this political world."[14]

Gertrude was fortunate to arrive back in North Carolina just as the Federation was forming. Her education in social reform issues and politics and her relationship to influential older clubwomen, such as her mother and aunt, naturally put her in line for clubwork. Sallie Cotten was also an old friend of the Weil family, especially Mina and

Sarah who strongly supported the founding of the Federation, and watched Gertrude's progress with interest. Gertrude's exuberance for civic reform through women's clubs earned her the nickname "Federation Gertie" from her close friend, Sally Kirby. Within a few years of Gertrude's return to Goldsboro, she chaired one of the most taxing Federation committees, the Publication Committee, and often served on more than one committee at a time. Sallie Cotten, impressed by Gertrude's enthusiasm and performance, had clearly tapped Gertrude for future leadership in the club. Letters between the two women show warmth, humor and mutual respect and distinctly mark the passing on of newly acquired responsibility from one generation of women to the next.

Cotten trained Gertrude for the practical aspects of future organizational duties and worked to give her broad public exposure. As chairman of the Publications Committee, and later as Recording Secretary, Gertrude was called upon to write articles explaining the work of the state Federation and its particular goals. To write these, Gertrude carefully researched exactly how to present the club and its policies to the public. With the publication of the articles, she had to accept responsibility for what she wrote and allow herself to be a public representative of the club's work. This put her in the eye of clubwomen across the South and others, such as politicians, who were sensitive to public opinion and action. Although very eager to please Cotten, Gertrude was understandably self-concious

about her work and apologized to her mentor for her performance. Cotten's reaction to these self-depricating apologies illustrates both her fondness and respect for her young protege: "I note what you say about the article in Everything - and you are wrong there too. I like the article because it is true and makes no oratorical effort. So please apologize to my Rec[ording] Sec[retary] [Gertrude]. and cease to slander her and depreciate her literary ability. I selected you to write the article and I am Satisfied - and that 'I' is as big as Theodore Roosevelt."[15]

In another letter, Sallie Cotten imparted lessons from her own experiences in hopes that Gertrude would learn to spot and avoid unecessary encumbrances in clubwork. While Gertrude was helping rewrite the state Federation's constitution, Cotten warned her in a motherly tone, "Child, you know nothing about perplexities until you try to incorporate an organization--which is not the same thing as a Corporation." Further warning Gertrude about taking on the publication of a women's club magazine, Cotten wrote:

> It is expensive to run an organ--much red tape about postal laws etc.--too many people to please and takes more time than one woman can give to it. I was Editor of the Official Organ for the Mothers Congress years ago [1896] and know something of the true inwardness of such things. We can get more publicity free through the daily papers or say weekly editions....It is a fact Gertrude that no official organ has ever succeeded permanently.[16]

With her sage and practical insights, Cotten helped shape her protege into a knowledgable leader even though Gertrude's personal experiences were limited. The examples of Cotten and other leading club women enabled Gertrude to

draw on the club's past efforts and use her leadership tools to extend the women's work even further.

Sarah Weil, Gertrude's aunt and next door neighbor, also introduced Gertrude to the ins and outs of women's clubs and especially their potential as agents of social change. Sarah worked hard for years to establish travelling libraries, first in the Goldsboro area and then throughout the state, to bring books to isolated areas and schools without libraries. As the travelling libraries gained support, Sarah and other Federation women worked to insure the continuance of the program by acquiring state authorization and funding. By giving more children easy access to reading materials, Sarah hoped to boost grassroots support for public education and create a need for state supplied textbooks. In 1909, Sarah and a sympathetic young lawyer successfully pushed the library bill through the Senate which officially granted the new North Carolina Library Commission a fifteen hundred dollar annual appropriation. The Federation turned over its travelling libraries to the Commission thereby transferring its self-initiated responsibility and authority to the State. The Commission elected Sarah as its vice-chairman in 1910 and she acted as the Federation's representative until 1913 when the Commission, to the great surprise of the women, severed its ties with the Federation and refused any financial support from the club. Sarah was particularly hurt by the Commission's display of ingratitude and the state's absolute cooptation of a project she had spent more than a

decade cultivating. In spite of the bitterness of the lesson, Sarah Weil's work was a watershed in the history of the club. As Sallie Cotten wrote with a note of irony, "The effort to secure the creation of this Commission was the initiation of the Federation into the unexplored fields of legislation...."[17]

The precedence of Sarah's lobbying in the political arena, and her election to the post of a state agency she helped create, made it easier for Gertrude to put herself in the public eye without fear of family disapproval. However, the Weil women did not always agree on what was acceptable behavior for one of their own, and Gertrude's youth made her actions all the more controversial. The three matriarchs, Eva Rosenthal, Mina and Sarah would discuss among themselves club politics and issues, and Gertrude did not always adhere to their opinions especially on the subject of woman suffrage. Gertrude was firmly in favor of such legislation, as she told the family biographer, "When I came home [from Smith] I wondered why people made speeches in favor of something so obviously right. Women breathed the same air, got the same education; it was ridiculous, spending so much energy and elocution on something rightfully theirs."[18] Eva and Mina would not actively support such an opinion and Sarah, although beginning to question the justice of the legislative system, had yet to proclaim such sentiments. Through clubwork, Gertrude began to assert her independence and make friends with many women who shared her views on women's rights. At this point she began to make her own mark

apart from her domineering mentors.

Even in the face of Weil family opposition, Gertrude succeeded in her ambition to be a leader and reformer in women's clubs. At this time in her life, her close friendships with women outside her family became particularly important. When the Weil women put up obstacles, Gertrude's friends encouraged her to do as she believed best. These women, through their loyalty, confidence and support, encouraged Gertrude to continue her interest in women's clubs and occassionaly protected her from difficult situations.

Her lifelong friendship with Sallie Simms Kirby, who held Federation offices before Gertrude, exemplifies the relationship between Gertrude's affectionate bonds with women and her work in women's clubs. The two women went to school together as children at Goldsboro Public School and, while Gertrude was being educated in the North, Kirby went to college in North Carolina and became a teacher. The women renewed their acquaintance after returning to Goldsboro and discovered they had a great deal in common through their college education and interest in women's clubs. When Gertrude travelled, Sallie always made sure to let her know she was missed and needed. The rhetoric of Sallie's letters was extremely reminiscent of those written by Susie Fulgham, Gertrude's childhood "sweetheart." As Sallie wrote in 1907, "Gertrude my dear, I have missed you terribly, please don't stay out there forever--really you know I have had the blues...or something and its the first time such a thing has

happened to me in months. If you were here and we could have some long walks I would be greatly improved. Now this is getting personal--I only want you to understand that I shall be so glad when you come home."[19] In addition to her expressions of love, Sallie kept Gertrude informed about club activities and inside gossip on Federation leaders. When it looked as though her friend might have a chance for a Federation office, Sally let Gertrude know when and where she needed to be in order to improve her chances of getting the post and generally encouraged her activities in the young and promising organization.

In spite of the lack of consensus among the Weil women, with the help of friends and her own strong will, Gertrude was able to act on her own judgement. The interplay of these contentious and supportive relationships is apparent in a letter from Sallie Kirby regarding a crucial state Federation meeting in Wilmington:

> ...By the way I had a letter from Mrs. Reilly [the club's vice-president] in which she said she hoped that I would see that "that charming Miss Weil went to Wilmington"--I told her I would do my best - and if you aren't elected next meeting it won't be my fault. I am crazy for you to go. I was telling Edna and Mary Borden & "Aunt Sarah" [Mrs. Sarah Weil] what Mrs. R. had said, & your aunt said "Well, Gertrude's family are very much opposed to her going"--And I said your mother had told me she would like for you to go as you always had such pleasant times, & your aunt said, "Well her grandmother doesn't want her to go"--So don't tell your grandmother that there's even a remote possibility of your going. But I just hope you will....[20]

Whether Gertrude heeded Sallie's warning or not, she attended the meeting. In a postcard sent from Wilmington to

her family, Gertrude remarked how much she enjoyed a lecture by a well known suffragette in the state, Dr. Delia Dixon-Carroll, on "Woman in Civics and the Home" and happily announced "We are having a fine time."[21]

Gertrude's presence at this particular meeting was important because she had persuaded club leaders to strengthen their ties with the national Federation. Gertrude had also worked to revise the state club's constitution and wanted to present her suggestions at the meeting. That year, the General Federation had changed its method of management and permitted state chapters to elect General Federation Secretaries to represent them at national meetings. There was a good chance that Gertrude's work had earned her the office.

State Federation President Margaret Gibson, in a letter prior to the meeting, asked Gertrude to "take up that matter of constitutional revision at the convention" but to do it "candidly."[22] Gibson confided that she approved of Gertrude's constitutional changes but wanted to avoid slighting one of the original framers, Mrs. Hollowell. As Gibson explained, "I would much rather have [the suggestions] come from you if you think it means no discourtesy to an older person. In any case, it could seem to come from you and I need not figure at all---that would make it all right. I do not feel that [Mrs. Hollowell's] mind is so well adapted to the technicalities as your own. I might put her on the committee but name you first as you would be chairman. I want you in control..." On the subject of Gertrude's pos-

sible election to the new office, Gibson told Gertrude, "Yes, there must be a place for the Gen. Fed. and its relation to the State Fed. and Miss Weil will be called upon at that time."[23] Clearly Gibson trusted Gertrude's ability to deal with club politics and respected her intelligence and leadership. Both women were gratified at the Wilmington meeting when she was elected to serve as General Federation Secretary.

For Gertrude, this election was a milestone. First, it signalled a change in the leadership of the state's most powerful women's clubs. Mrs. Hollowell, also from Goldsboro, was an early leader in the women's club movement but still quite conservative. Gertrude, on the other hand, symbolized the ascending generation of educated and ambitious young women actively interested in politics and government. Even though leadership was shifting, she had to be diplomatic and not alienate the founders who first worked to unify the state's women. Secondly, her executive position in the organization enabled her to actively lobby for reform legislation. From this vantage point, Gertrude discovered for herself complicated and seamy aspects of the political system. Additionally, her new role as a leader of the state's women allowed her to test and implement political ideas she learned while living and studying in the North.

Both Gertrude's experiences at Smith College and work in women's clubs acted as her "political nurseries." Courses at Smith had given her a basic understanding of the mechan-

ics of society; clubwork allowed Gertrude to act upon her views on women, poverty and a class-based capitalistic system. Because of her education and interest in politics, other women looked to her for advice and guidance in choosing legislative measures to endorse. As an active floor lobbyist, she learned how political alliances and agreements were made and which politicians could be counted on for support of women's issues. Most importantly, she learned that politicking was not confined to the House chambers. Rather, support had to be cultivated in more social settings and "bought" through favors. As long as women could not vote, they had little with which to trade and influence the Legislature.

Beginning in 1911 the endeavors of the state Federation focused on political discrimination against women. In trying to upgrade the conditions of public schools, the women found their influence limited by a constitutional restriction which stated that only men could serve on school boards. The Federation rallied the women and bombarded the Legislature with letters and telegrams in favor of a Teachers' Assembly and Federation bill nullifying the restriction. The school board issue politicized some of the most conservative Federation members and so infuriated the club's state president, Sallie Cotton, that she publicly remarked, "Must we all become suffragettes!?" As a result of the fight for school board admittance the clubwomen had become more interested in the status of women in the state; at that same meeting the Special Committee on Legal Status of Women in Professions

was organized to investigate the legal rights of the state's working women. Sarah Weil was one of the committee of three, the other two women, Dr. Delia Dixon-Carroll and Edith Royster, were well known suffrage supporters. Sarah Weil, with her experience working with the legislature, was a likely choice as a committee member, but she still did not openly support woman suffrage at this time.[24]

At the 1913 annual club convention in New Bern, Cotten triumphantly praised the women for their united and successful effort for the school boards' admittance of women.[25] This meeting also marked the emergence of the club as a receptive forum for open discourse on the rights of women. The Special Committee on the Legal Status of Women in Professions arranged for Judge Walter Clark, a long time advocate of woman suffrage, to speak before the convention. According to Sallie Cotten, the Judge

> probed into the past when women were chattels and playthings. He showed the development in mentality and strength in the present, and prophesied citizenship and continued development in the future. The address was forcible, logical, and eloquent. An ovation was given him by a rising audience.... Question after question pounded the Judge from the floor....Many clubwomen made short talks and many seeds of legal truth were left to germinate in the brains of the women.[26]

Clark had the sympathies of some of the most powerful women in the club, but the suffrage issue was a divisive factor among individual members so Federation endorsement had been avoided. Now, however, with enough younger more progressive women coming into the fold, the opportunity arose for the organization of new clubs dedicated to securing the right

of women to vote.

Gertrude was an avid proponent of women's suffrage and had been outspoken on the issue since her Smith College days. As early as 1908, she wrote influential men in the state challenging their sexist definitions of "citizen" and offering her opinion that suffrage was a right of all citizens of majority age.[27] Gertrude's family and friends were aware of her intense feelings but not everyone agreed with her on the issue. When she organized the Goldsboro Equal Suffrage League in 1914, Gertrude could not rely on either her mother, aunt or grandmother for support. Only one of the club's twenty charter members was from the family, Elizabeth Oettinger, Mina's cousins' wife. Regardless of the matriarchs' disapproval, she continued to organize the women of her community knowing she was not alone in her work for the cause.

The first official statewide Equal Suffrage League meeting was held in March 1914, and within a month of that meeting Gertrude founded the suffrage league in Goldsboro. In May, Gertrude was elected First Vice-President of the state Federation at the annual convention and received a great deal of notoriety as a reslut of her election to the prestigious post. By the next year she had made enough of an impression on the state's Equal Suffrage League members to be elected the second vice-president of that organization. That same year, the Nominating Committee of the state Federation announced that Gertrude was their first nominee for

the office of the President. At that meeting, "a spontaneous ovation was given the announcement, and several minutes elapsed before Miss Weil could be heard, declining the honor offered. She had served the Federation ever since its organization in so many capacities and always with such ability that the Convention refused to consider her declination. She was firm and nominations from the floor were called for."[28] Now at the age of thirty-five, Gertrude was being elected to high offices in two of the most active and controversial clubs in the state. It was clear that she could not accept the duties of an executive officer in both clubs and had to make a choice between her work in the Federation and her efforts to secure a political voice for women.

By this time, Gertrude had made the decision that obtaining political equality for women was her first priority. Reminiscent of the lessons she wrote in her Smith College notebooks, Gertrude believed that women were key factors in improving the lot of humanity but they could not be effective without political power. Further believing that women, if organized, could change their position in society, Gertrude decided to focus her energies on obtaining the vote for women through the suffrage organizations. In 1920 the Nineteenth Amendment was signed during her term as President of the North Carolina Equal Suffrage League.

CONCLUSION

> Because women felt the need to bring intellectual stimulation to their Communities, because they felt the need to better physical & social conditions about them they banded together and organized themselves into clubs & ultimately into federations. Because women saw that the quickest & surest way to attain those ends was through the force of their influence as registered in the ballot, they began to work for women's suf[frage] & organized themselves into leagues.
> 29

In these two sentences, presented at the 1918 Convention of the North Carolina Federation of Women's Clubs, Gertrude Weil succinctly summarized the evolution of women's political power in the United States and the simultaneous introduction of social issues into American politics. However, the simplicity of the phrases does not captured the personal histories that were essential parts of the large scale entrance of women into political and public spheres. To understand this transition it is necessary to look closely at the individual historical processes which enabled these women to break from centuries of tradition.

The evolution of woman's status and her place as a political power in this country can only be understood if the lives of individual women of that generation are explored and treated as indications of their political future. Political history, to be complete, must include the impact of women's clubs as part of the history of political process

and the formation of government. It is hoped that this account of the development of one woman's political consciousness and her positioning for public action through women's clubs will contribute to a broader understanding of United States political and social history.

In the case of Gertrude Weil, education played a key role in preparing her to work for social reform. Both her unique Southern education and experiences in Northern schools instilled a new sense of women's place in the world. Taught to appreciate her own intellectual capacity and ability as well as that of her sex, she learned to use her intellect to question social injustices and seek answers. Interacting at Smith College with a community of women dedicated to common pursuits, she developed a need to be part of an activist sisterhood--a need fulfilled through participation in women's clubs and a growing network of activist women who gave each other support and assurance that their work was worthwhile.

The women's club movement gave Gertrude the opportunity to hone administrative skills and exercise leadership. Under Sallie Cotten's tutelage, Gertrude was introduced to potential problems and taught how to avoid conflicts before they arose. As a recipient of Cotten's experiencial wisdom, Gertrude was a link between the old guard of club women and the younger ones coming up through the ranks. She was also linked to the older generation by her female relatives: her mother, Mina, who encouraged her decisions to take up non-

traditional academic studies, and her aunt, Sarah, who served as an example of an active club woman with a special status forged out of the women's club movement. Gertrude's work in the clubs likewise gave her a stature usually reserved for married women but obtainable through leadership in women's organizations. Although Gertrude had no husband or children, these were not essential to her identity which she built on personal accomplishments. The love of her friends and the respect of the state's women gave her the strength to free herself from the influence of powerful relatives. As a participant in the women's discussions and efforts for social change, Gertrude gained a sense of solidarity and political responibility.

Like many women in the club movement, Gertrude's work symbolized a compromise between the role of women as nurturing caretakers of home and family and the desires of a new breed of college educated women to have vocations outside the traditional female sphere. The women's clubs concentrated their efforts on legislation and programs, such as health, education and social service projects, which sought to improve community and home life. In addition, Gertrude did not leave her family and embark on a paying career, but she did take up issues which would involve her in the traditionally male concern of politics. Rather than disassociating herself from communities of women in order to work in a "man's world," she worked with the homosocial networks to bring political issues into the women's realm of activity and to make the women's concerns viable political issues.

The reform minded women of Gertrude's generation continued to effect change through the woman suffrage movement, World War I and on through the New Deal. Their basis for desired social change, developed in the midst of the upheaval of the 1890s and nurtured through the Progressive Era, continued to influence social reforms through the century. As the clubwomen worked to broaden the social responsibilities of the state, as in the case of Sarah Weil and the Library Commission, the state "captured" these same responsibilities from the women's clubs, thereby making the women's concerns the new jurisdiction of the state and taking the programs out of the hands of the clubs. However, in times of crisis, such as the war and the Depression, the women's experience and well developed networks of clubwomen proved invaluable in aiding and organizing large numbers of people. In North Carolina, the clubwomen most active during the 1910s and 1920s later held official government positions and directed the implementation of New Deal policies in the state. Rather than spending their time and abilities as volunteers in social service, these women were taken onto the payroll of the state and federal governments where they worked within the bureaucracy of child welfare, education and social service departments they helped create.

Gertrude Weil was just one of these women who envisioned a more egalitarian society and worked to develop a community of people willing to fight for social reforms. The battles fought by the Federation and the Equal Suffrage

League were not easily or quickly won, nor did any legislative victories remain safe. Personal vigilance had to be maintained, and for Gertrude this committment endured from the Spanish-American War through two world wars, the Depression, Vietnam and the Civil Rights Movement. Through all those years of crisis, Gertrude Weil was intimately and acutely aware of the personal sacrifices required of a "New Woman," a political woman. In compensation, she lived to participate in the institutionalization of social welfare programs, and in improving working conditions and opening new doors for the nation's women. She also lived to see the North Carolina General Assembly, one of the few assemblies which did not approve the national women's suffrage amendment in 1920, finally ratify the Nineteenth Amendment on May 6, 1971. At the end of that month, ninety-one year old Gertrude Weil died in her sleep in the room in which she was born in Goldsboro, North Carolina.

Chapter III and Conclusion:

1. Chafe, p 27.

2. Letter to Gertrude Weil from Mina Weil, April, 1901. Weil Papers.

3. Letter to Henry Weil and the children from Mina Weil, Aug. 5, 1901. Weil Papers.

4. Letter to "Dear Ones" from Gertrude, March 16, 1902. Weil Papers.

5. Ibid, March 21, 1902.

6. Ibid, March 23, 1902.

7. Horowitz, p. 280.

8. Letter to Gertrude Weil from Mina Weil, n.d. May 20, 1898?. Weil Papers.

9. Goldsboro Argus, June 1, 1898.

10. Goldsboro Argus, March 23, 1898.

11. Letter to Mina Weil from Edwin Alderman, August 25, 1899.

12. Goldsboro Argus, November 1, 1907.

13. Samuel Ashe, Stephen Weeks, Charles Van Noppen, eds., Biographical History of North Carolina, Charles Van Noppen, publisher, Greensboro, 1917, p. 127

14. Nellie Roberson, p. 614.

15. Letter to Gertrude Weil from Sallie Southall Cotten, December 21, 1912. Weil Papers.

16. Ibid, June 29, 1913.

17. Sallie Southall Cotten. The History of the North Carolina Fedration of Women's Clubs 1901-1925, Edwards Printers, Raleigh, N.C., 1925, p. 31.

18. Rountree, p. 133.

19. Letter from Sallie Simms Kirby to Gertrude Weil, 1907. Weil Papers.

20. Letter to Gertrude Weil ("Dearest") from Sallie Kirby, March 20, 1907. Weil Papers. The records do not sufficently answer why some of the Weil women did not want Gertrude to go to the meeting. It does not make sense that they thought her possible election to an office undesireable; Mrs. Sarah Weil ("Aunt Sarah") had been elected to a Federation office the previous year. Gertrude's grandmother frequently "fought" with Gertrude over Gertrude's work for various causes so this may have been the reason for opposition. However, the evidence I have found does not lead to any certain conclusion.

21. Cotten, p. 22. Postcard to the Weil family from Gertrude Weil, April 24, 1907. Weil Papers.

22. Letter to Gertrude Weil from Miss Margaret Gibson, March 8, 1908. Weil Papers.

23. Ibid.

24. North Carolina Federation of Women's Clubs, Year Book, Joseph J. Stone and Company, Raleigh, North Carolina, 1911-1912, 1912-1913, pp. 52-5 1913-1914, pp. 50-4, 1914-1915, pp. 47-9.

25. Cotten, p. 61

26. Ibid, p. 65.

27. Letter from E.C. Brooks to Gertrude Weil, May 19, 1908. Weil Papers.

28. Ibid, p. 85.

29. A rough draft of a speech presented by Gertrude Weil, a representative of the North Carolina Equal Suffrage League, at the 1918 North Carolina Women's Clubs Annual Convention. Weil Papers.

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